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AMIDST the various branches of the Fine Arts in which Ancient Greece excelled, there seems to be none in which her pre-eminence stands more undisputed than that of *Sculpture*. In Music she was far distant from any perfection; and indeed it is in modern times only that this art has received its highest improvements. In Painting, too, whatever we may be told of the high admiration in which a Zeuxis and an Apelles were held by their countrymen, yet there is very good reason to believe that the moderns have far exceeded the ancients. In Poetry, though we shall not presume to say that other nations have gone beyond the Greeks; yet surely it must be allowed, that the Roman poets, as well as those of modern times, approach so near the Grecian models, as to suffer very little from the comparison. But in Sculpture the Greeks stand confessedly unrivalled, as having attained the summit of perfection. All the productions, not only of modern, but even of Roman Sculpture, are acknowledged to be inferior to those perfect and finished models which Greece produced. In short, however much

much the partisans of modern times may be inclined to dispute the palm with the ancients in others of the Fine Arts, yet in that of Sculpture all seem to concur in confessing the superiority of the Grecian artists. And I think their arriving at such excellence in this art may be accounted for from very obvious and satisfactory causes.

Sculpture or Statuary is one of the imitative arts which mankind would very early practise; and accordingly there are few, even of the most uncultivated nations, among whom we do not find some rude attempts to form images in wood or in stone, if not in metal. To represent with any correctness and accuracy, a solid figure upon a plain surface, would not so readily occur, as the idea of forming the resemblance of a man, or any other animal, in stone or marble. Painting, therefore, is of later invention than Statuary; and being an art of much greater difficulty, would consequently be much slower of coming to any considerable degree of perfection. To acquire the art of properly distributing light and shade, so as to make the several figures stand out from the canvas; to possess the power of animating those figures with the most natural and glowing colours; to throw them into groupes of a pleasing form; to preserve that perfect proportion of size and distance which

perſpective demands; are thoſe excellencies of Painting which it has required the efforts and the experience of many ſucceſſive ages to attain. To form a finiſhed ſtatue is neither ſo complex nor ſo difficult an art. To be able, by means of the chiſſel, to bring the rude block of marble to preſent the exact reſemblance of the moſt graceful human form, is no doubt a ſurpriſing and beautiful effort of induſtry and genius; and it would require a conſiderable time before ſuch an art could attain perfection; but that perfection being obviouſly much more eaſily attainable than any excellence in painting, ſo it would neceſſarily be much ſooner acquired. As more readily to be acquired, it would naturally be more generally practiſed; and this circumſtance again would, in its turn, accelerate the progreſs of the art.

The athletic exerciſes of the Greeks, joined to the natural beauty of the human form, for which their country and climate were diſtinguiſhed, furniſhed ready models for Sculpture. To Painting they afforded much leſs aſſiſtance. The mere muſcular exertions of the body are favourite objects of imitation for the Statuary, and from the ſucceſsful copy he acquires the very higheſt degree of renown. Painting draws its beſt ſubjects from other ſources; from the combination of figures, from the features of emotion,

emotion, from the eye of paſſion. Groupes in Sculpture (if we except works in *relief*, which are much leſs diſtinct and ſtriking than pictures) are perhaps too near nature to be pleaſing. It is certainly true, as a moſt ingenious and excellent philoſopher has obſerved, that we are not pleaſed with imitation when ſhe preſſes too cloſe upon reality: A coloured ſtatue is offenſive; and the wax-work figures of Mrs. *Wright*, which ſhe dreſſes in the habits of the times, and places in various attitudes in different parts of the room, excite ſurpriſe indeed, but never produce delight. Sculpture, therefore, thus confined to ſingle figures, ſeems little leſs inferior to Painting, than was the ode recited by one perſon at the feaſt of *Bacchus*, to the perfect drama of *Sophocles* and *Euripides*.

When Statuary reached its higheſt excellence in Greece, the art of Painting had made but a ſlender progreſs. The admiration of the works which their painters produced, ſeems to have proceeded more from a ſenſe of the great difficulty of the art, and from ſurpriſe at the effects it produced, than from the pictures truly meriting the high praiſes we find beſtowed upon them. To the eye of taſte, the work of the Statuary was the more complete and finiſhed production; the art was accordingly more generally cultivated; and by the authors of antiquity the ſtatues

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of Greece are more frequently mentioned than their paintings, are ſpoken of, and dwelt upon, in ſuch terms as ſufficiently ſhow them to have been conſidered as the ſuperior and more admirable exertions of the taſte and genius of that elegant people.

If we admit theſe circumſtances to account for the very high degree of perfection which Grecian Sculpture attained, it will not be very difficult to explain why they have never been ſurpaſſed, and why the art itſelf has ever ſince declined. When any art has received a very high, or perhaps its utmoſt degree of perfection, this circumſtance of itſelf neceſſarily deſtroys that noble emulation which alone can ſtimulate to excellence. Conſcious of being unable to ſurpaſs the great models which he ſees, the artiſt is diſcouraged from making attempts. The poſts of honour are already occupied; ſuperior praiſe and glory are not to be reached; and the ardour of the artiſt is checked by perceiving that he cannot exceed, and that, after all his efforts, he will not be able perhaps to equal, the productions of thoſe maſters who have already the advantage of an eſtabliſhed reputation.

It is for theſe reaſons, as has been juſtly obſerved, that when the arts and ſciences come to perfection in any ſtate, they from that moment naturally

naturally and neceſſarily decline; and if this be the caſe, then ſurely the more perfect degree of excellence any art has attained, the more certain muſt be its after-decay. We may indeed carry the obſervation ſomewhat farther, and affirm, that if the art has arrived at the higheſt degree of perfection of which it is capable in any age, or in any ſituation, that art will not only naturally decline amongſt the people where it ſo flouriſhed, but that this circumſtance will prevent its ever being again brought to any conſiderable pitch of improvement amongſt any other people, while the firſt perfect models remain. The excellence of Homer, whatever might be its effects on his own countrymen, did not repreſs the genius of Virgil, or of Lucretius; nor did the reputation of theſe great poets of antiquity check the ardour of Taſſo, or of Milton. But the difference of language, the infinite choice of ſubjects, and the variety of powers which poetry can employ, prevent the eminence of a poet in one country from having much effect in damping the efforts of the poets in another. With regard to Sculpture, however, the caſe is widely different. No diverſity of ſubjects, no variety of powers to exert, no difference in the mode of expreſſing his conceptions, fall to the ſhare of a Statuary. A correct repreſentation of the exterior human form,

form, marked perhaps with ſome of the ſtronger expreſſions of the countenance, the chuſing a graceful or a ſtriking figure, the throwing it into a pleaſing or an intereſting attitude, and the finiſhing the whole production with the moſt nice and exquiſite workmanſhip, conſtitute the utmoſt limits of the Sculptor's art. When the higheſt excellence in theſe, therefore, has been attained, and while thoſe perfect models remain, they muſt ever after repreſs emulation in the art, and cruſh all the efforts of genius.

Together with this general cauſe, there is another which has very much contributed to the decline of the art of Sculpture in modern times, and that is, the great improvements, and the extraordinary pitch of excellence which Painting attained ſoon after the revival of arts and letters in Europe. This had naturally the effect of directing the attention of all ingenious artiſts to cultivate the art of Painting, where glory and praiſe were ſure to be acquired, rather than to Statuary, where no laurels were to be won. The models of ancient Statuary held the place of nature to the ſtudy and imitation of the great artiſts of that time: But imitative ingenuity and ambition had no room in working on marble, after marbles already perfect. To tranſlate them (if I may be allowed the

the expreſſion) into Painting, was an object that gave emulation ſcope; and in fact it happened that the chiſſel of the Greeks was the great guide of the Roman pencil. Not only the novelty of the art of Painting, in conſequence of the improvements it had received, but alſo the greater field which it afforded for the exertions of genius, contributed to render it the great object of attention. The more perfect repreſentation it exhibited of the human form by the aid of colouring, the variety of figures which it admitted of being introduced, and the opportunity it preſented of intereſting and engaging the paſſions of the beholder, were all circumſtances which naturally concurred to make it be held the more favoured and eſtimable diſplay of an artiſt's power.